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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MUSTAFA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/01/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#)
SUBJECT: SENIOR PA ADVISOR: "WE'RE COUNTING ON THE
INCAPABILITY OF HAMAS."

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) "Al-Ayyam" editor Akram Hanniyyah told visiting NEA A/S Welch and DAPNSA Abrams on April 1 that he expects Hamas to focus on governing rather than politics or resistance in the short term, but that he believes the challenge of actually governing PA controlled areas would prove too much for the movement. He denigrated the new cabinet members and said that Hamas still had no real plan or capability to govern. Hamas is likely to give Abu Mazen room to negotiate with the Israelis and the U.S., but any resulting agreements would need to be subject to a national referendum. Abu Mazen is in the process of appointing special assistants within the office of the President to help cover significant issues, but these individuals would not function as a shadow cabinet. Abu Mazen would maintain charge over the National Security Forces and would stand-up a body, reporting to the President, that would control senior officer promotions. However, Abu Mazen would also issue a decree assigning those forces to the Interior Minister for specific tasks and missions. Hanniyyah said that Fatah as a party is making necessary changes gradually, the Fatah Old Guard is losing influence, the choice for Palestinians is really only between Fatah and Hamas, and highlighted the Fatah PLC members as the ones to watch.

¶2. (U) Attendees:

Palestinian

Akram Hanniyyah

U.S.

NEA A/S David Welch
DAPNSA Elliot Abrams
Consul General
NEA Staff Assistant
PolChief (notetaker)

Hamas Governance Prospects

¶3. (C) Hanniyyah said that there had been an intellectual "awakening" as Palestinian society came to grips with the newly sworn-in Hamas cabinet. He said the early focus of

Hamas would be governance rather than engaging in partisan politics or armed resistance, and described the movement as having a "lust for power" that would focus on the eventual establishment of an Islamic state. He thought that Hamas would never recognize Israel, beyond the current de facto characterization. Hanniyyah said Hamas would likely cede dealings with Israel and the United States to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), but they would ask that any agreement reached by Abu Mazen be approved in a national referendum. In the meantime, he saw Hamas as looking for a four-to-six month grace period as they faced increased "grilling" from the Palestinian people, the international community, and from within the movement itself.

¶4. (C) Hanniyyah denigrated the Hamas ministers, saying they are an unimpressive collection that seemed to consist mainly of clerics and sheikhs, with educational credentials not necessarily appropriate to their ministries. He projected difficulties ahead for Hamas financing; while Arab League members had scrambled to send financing to the PA before the new cabinet was sworn in (thereby avoiding disputes with the U.S. and other interested parties), it was neither clear where Hamas would get additional funding nor whether Hamas truly recognized the scale of the financial problems facing it. He quoted Hamas leader Khalid Mishaal's recent comments in Bahrain, wherein Mishaal described Hamas as having two alternatives: accepting U.S. and Israeli conditions - which the movement would never do - or being patient and trusting that God would provide. Hanniyyah was skeptical, believed Hamas was being too optimistic, and thought in fact that Hamas had absolutely nothing to offer the Palestinian people in terms of governance.

¶5. (C) A/S Welch and Mr. Abrams previewed upcoming U.S. statements on assistance to the Palestinian people and our focus on supporting the people rather than the government.

Hanniyyah was supportive, saying the Palestinian leadership couldn't openly or officially support such a distinction, but that it was key to demonstrate that the U.S. and other donors were not abandoning the Palestinian people.

Abu Mazen Activities

¶6. (C) Hanniyyah said Abu Mazen is in the process of appointing special assistants within the office of the President to cover important issues; he differentiated these assistants from any sort of "shadow cabinet." Hanniyyah expected about four to five positions to be created, and noted that foreign policy had always been the responsibility of the President. He said that Abu Mazen might restore the negotiations committee, making it smaller than before, but perhaps including Hamas PM Ismael Hanniyyah or another senior Hamas official - not to negotiate, but rather to monitor.

¶7. (C) In response to a query from Mr. Abrams about the future of the PA Security Forces (PASF), Hanniyyah said that Abu Mazen would maintain control over the National Security Forces, but would delegate their operational usage to the Interior Minister for specific missions and tasks. He said that Abu Mazen would activate the officers' committee provided for in the National Security Law, a board that would approve the promotion of senior PASF officers and thereby assure their allegiance to the President. Hanniyyah did not believe Hamas would rush to take over the security portfolio, nor to absorb their al-Qassam forces into the PASF.

¶8. (C) Welch and Abrams stressed that the Israelis are looking for a Palestinian partner that is credible and effective. Hanniyyah said Abu Mazen is that partner and that, over the long term, the Israelis would need Palestinians who would recognize their country and its borders; he did not believe that Hamas could ever be that party. He urged that incoming Israeli PM Olmert build a relationship with Abu Mazen in order to "corner Hamas."

Future of Fatah

¶9. (C) Hanniyyah said that more Palestinians are now seeking to become members of Fatah, and that he saw slow and gradual positive change inside the organization. He commended Fatah members for their discipline in not joining what eventually became a Hamas-only cabinet. Hanniyyah thought that the party's "Old Guard" and associated institutions such as the Fatah Central Committee are losing power, and urged observers to keep focused on Fatah members in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) as examples of new Fatah leadership. He said Fatah is going back to its original roots, and is also considering the establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a public policy institute through which to develop policy and an agenda.

¶10. (C) Hanniyyah stressed the importance of supporting a renewed Fatah, saying that the poor showing of "third-way" candidates in the recent PLC elections demonstrated that Hamas and Fatah are the only real Palestinian parties. He said that progress within Fatah is being spearheaded by its younger members and that Abu Mazen welcomed these efforts. He reiterated the need to watch Fatah PLC activities, and thought that two potential sensitive areas for Hamas would be payment of salaries and progress on the issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

¶11. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this cable.
WALLES